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“Yes, There’s a Difference”

Seed inputs are increasing crop yields in Kandahar and helping farmers retake the local market



“You can tell just by looking that these are better cucumbers. But the real difference is the taste. They’re becoming very popular here.”

—Laleh, a Kandahar produce vendor

Laleh wakes up early in the morning. The produce vendor jokes that even the roosters are still sleeping when he wheels his produce cart out onto the quiet Kandahari streets to take his daily supply of cucumbers to market.

Laleh buys his cucumbers from local farmers, which takes a little more time than buying foreign-grown cucumbers from the big distributors. But his customers can tell the difference, and that means more business.

The cucumbers were grown with seed inputs from USAID. The seeds are of a higher quality than local varieties and yield a greater number of cucumbers per plant. Farmers who received seeds were also given training in improved agricultural practice, such as irrigation and fertilization. The end result is a larger, healthier harvest of delicious vegetables that enables local farmers to compete with cheap foreign imports.

Throughout the day, Laleh does a brisk business. Late in the afternoon, Mohammed Khan approaches his stand. Khan plays cards every Thursday, and today is his turn to bring snacks. He remarks that at 20 cents a kilo, Laleh’s cucumbers cost slightly more than those at other stands.

“Try it and you’ll see why,” the vendor says, cutting a slice and handing it to Khan on the edge of his knife. Khan nods approvingly.

“It’s definitely tastier,” he says. “It’s really moist, and it doesn’t have as many seeds as you find with other cucumbers.”

Laleh has only been selling local cucumbers since the first USAID crops were harvested several months ago. During that time he’s seen other vendors begin switching to local varieties of produce as well, such as corn, tomatoes and beans. Customers are willing to pay slightly more for better products, meaning that local produce with USAID’s assistance is gaining competitive advantage over low-price imports.

“This is great. Why should people buy their cucumbers or tomatoes from Pakistan when we have wonderful varieties right here?”

Greater market competitiveness means more income for farmers. And with more income, more people are willing to turn to farming as a source of livelihood, making communities more stable in this volatile region of Afghanistan.